Leadership Studies
UNIVERSITY OF DENVER

2025-26

Annual Report







Prepared by
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Letter from the Director

On behalf of all our “staculty” in the Leadership Studies department, I am delighted to share this annual report with our campus and community partners. This past year has been a momentous one from multiple perspectives. We have expanded the reach of our minor, created new courses, partnered with multiple community organizations, welcomed alumni back to campus, and sustained our work with students in creating a sense of belonging at DU and opportunities to engage in community partnership.

This fall, we are launching a new Leadership and Social Impact minor with distinct pathways that enable all students at DU to pursue a minor in leadership. Our re-envisioned curriculum maintains a focus on leadership that is inclusive and socially minded while also prioritizing practical leadership skills like conflict resolution, public speaking, and project management. These revisions provide opportunities for students in our cohort programs to continue their pursuit of a leadership minor in multiple ways. Finally, we have implemented new courses in emotionally intelligent leadership, narrative and civic leadership, and listening and discernment among others.

Additionally, this past year we have continued our partnership with the Denver-based organization Youth Celebrate Diversity. Through this collaboration, our faculty and students have co-developed their fall Power Up trainings and hosted multiple leadership workshops at their annual conference that attracts high school students from throughout the Rocky Mountain West.

It may be hard to believe, because we probably don’t look a day over 25, but PLP celebrated its 30th anniversary this year. We welcomed over 100 alumni back to campus for a wonderful gala, a leadership development workshop, and our first ever student vs. alumni broomball game. It was a wonderful event with much to celebrate!

Our CWC Leadership Scholars Program held the 2nd annual Colloquium which was co-organized by current student scholars. The program highlighted student research, student-led interactive exhibits and a powerful keynote address.

Another highlight at the culmination of the year was hosting Rob Cohen, owner of the Denver Summit FC and Emily Allen, Community Liaison of the 14ers Supporters Group who shared so many leadership lessons from their experience with the founding of Denver's newest professional sports team.

It was a remarkable year, and I am so grateful for all the relationships that comprise the leadership that happens within and around our department. I'd like to offer my deepest thanks to our "staculty" team, to our students, to our alumni, and to our campus and community partners.

Onward!



Paul Kosempel, PhD

Leadership Studies

Colorado Women's College Leadership Scholars (CWC) and the PLP Leadership Studies Program (PLP) have been developing the leadership skills of some of the University of Denver's most talented undergraduate students for decades. They are four-year, integrated learning experiences that combine coursework, a residential community (PLP only), civic and community engagement, and professional networks to develop citizen leaders.



Mission and Values

Mission

- The Leadership Studies Program at the University of Denver promotes inclusive leadership through intellectual engagement, personal development, collaborative problem-solving and service learning in the community. We provide a multidisciplinary and comprehensive academic program preparing undergraduate students for the responsibilities and challenges of leadership in the diverse and complex world of the 21st Century. The program advances students' understanding of self as leader/follower, leadership theory and research, interpersonal skills and competencies that support inclusive leadership effectiveness, a more fully developed code of personal and organizational ethics, and an enhanced sense of social responsibility and citizenship.

Values

As a Leadership Studies minor we uphold the values of the University, expect full support of the DU Honor code, and promote the following character and community values to create a fertile learning environment for growth:

1. Intellectual Curiosity and Rigor: willingness to go beyond the surface of issues and concepts; to cultivate a life-long learning attitude and approach
2. Inclusion: a commitment to the richness and value that individuals and communities with distinctiveness bring to all our lives and communities
3. Civic Commitment: an awareness and concern for the contributions and interdependence of communities and individual behaviors in promoting the public good
4. Responsibility: developing dependability, accountability, and self-control
5. Integrity: value-based actions, rooted in a personal code of ethics
6. Caring: kind, generous, charitable, and responsive to others
7. Openness and Civility: inclusive instead of exclusive relationships marked by respect and genuine interest
8. Courage: standing up for self, others and ideas that matter for the public good

Leadership Studies Curriculum

New Leadership and Social Impact Minor Pathways

We are excited to see multiple years of hard work by our faculty come to fruition with our new minor pathways. This curriculum revision achieves many goals, specifically:

- Creation of a new minor pathway for all students at DU
- Decrease in credits required to allow students more flexibility and keeping our minor consistent with other academic offerings on campus
- Greater fit for students in STEM and Music degrees to complete minor
- Ability for students to pursue community engaged work through internship or team initiative
- Increase in leadership studies electives to more effectively meet student interests and allow greater customization of leadership education

<table>
<tr><th>CWC*</th><th>PLP*</th><th>Army ROTC</th><th>Air Force ROTC</th><th>University</th></tr>
<tr><td>LDRS 2200 – Foundations of Feminist and Cultural Leadership</td><td>LDRS 2201 – Introduction to Leading and Leadership</td><td>LDRS 2000 – Foundations of Leadership</td><td>LDRS 2000 – Foundations of Leadership</td><td>LDRS 2000 – Foundations of Leadership</td></tr>
<tr><td>LDRS 2210 – Leadership, Identity, Group Process</td><td>LDRS 2211 - Communication for Leading and Leadership</td><td>RTC1 2031: Methods of Leadership and Management</td><td>RTC2 2010: Team and Leadership Fundamentals</td><td>LDRS Course Electives (8 credits)</td></tr>
<tr><td>LDRS 2220 – Power, Practice, and Place in Leadership</td><td>LDRS 2221 - Group Process and Social Change</td><td>RTC1 2041: Methods of Leadership and Management</td><td>RTC2 3010/3020: Leading People and Effective Communication,</td><td>Elective: LDRS Courses or Courses with PLDR attribute (4 credits)</td></tr>
<tr><td>LDRS 2230 - Leading through Difference: Relational and Ethical Approaches</td><td>LDRS 2231 - Leading in Community</td><td>RTC1 3072: Adaptive Leadership</td><td>RTC2 3030/3031: National Security, Leadership Responsibilities, and Commissioning Preparation</td><td rowspan="5">LDRS 3000 – Leadership for the Public Good</td></tr>
<tr><td>LDRS 2240 – Embodied Leadership Lab 1^</td><td>LDRS 2240 – Embodied Leadership Lab 1^</td><td>RTC1 3082: Leadership in a Complex World</td><td rowspan="3">LDRS 3000 – Leadership for the Public Good</td></tr>
<tr><td>LDRS 2241 – Embodied Leadership Lab 2^</td><td>LDRS 2241 – Embodied Leadership Lab 2^</td><td rowspan="2">LDRS 3000 – Leadership for the Public Good</td></tr>
<tr><td>LDRS 3000 – Leadership for the Public Good</td><td>LDRS 3000 – Leadership for the Public Good</td></tr>
<tr><td colspan="5">* CWC and PLP Cohorts have 4 credits of electives required
^LDRS 2240 and LDRS 2241 can be replaced with Signature Leadership Initiative (internship)</td></tr>
</table>

Leadership Studies Curriculum, cont'd

Character and Leadership Micro-credential

In 2025-26, our department partnered with the 4D Experience Team to launch a new micro-credential in Leadership and Character. This unique offering provides a lower commitment pathway to receive a credential related to leadership. Students are able to:

- Develop a Portfolio related to their understanding and development of character and leadership
- Take two one-credit leadership courses
- Explore the study of three different virtues: compassion, resilience, and integrity







Leadership Studies Existing and New Elective Courses

LDRS 2000 Foundations of Leadership
LDRS 2130 Listening and Discernment
LDRS 2310 Leadership in a Virtual World
LDRS 2325 Narrative and Civic Leadership
LDRS 2340 Gender and Leadership
LDRS 2345 Animated Leadership
LDRS 2355 Systems Thinking and Complexity
LDRS 2360 Leadership in Film
LDRS 2370 Leading with Development in Mind
LDRS 2395 Emotionally Intelligent Leadership
LDRS 2400 Leadership and Sustainability in Belize
LDRS 2420 Leadership in the Movement for Irish Independence
LDRS 2430 Leadership, Peace, and Conflict in Northern Ireland
LDRS 2450 Decolonisation and Leadership in Aotearoa (New Zealand)
LDRS 2460 Leadership in Prague History
LDRS 2911 The Job & Internship Search: Taking the Lead in Your Career Development
LDRS 2912 Careers and Leadership Development
LDRS 2920 Adventures in Fellowship

Community Engagement

The University of Denver's long history of service is grounded in a tradition of commitment to the community. Leadership Studies was designed to link formal learning experiences and concepts in leadership with learning and involvement in the community. With a focus on citizen leadership, our program engages and equips students through group projects, community learning and service opportunities, and internships that improve the conditions of our community.

Partners in Community (PICs) projects, Community Learning Field Placements (CLFPs), and Community Change Initiatives (CCIs)

CWC's Partners in Community (PICS) and PLP's Community Learning Field Placement (CLFP) and Community Change Initiative (CCI) projects entail first and second year community service and engagement initiatives that are embedded in the coursework and co-curricular learning. The first year, each student selects a community partner site that they will commit to volunteering at over the whole school year. First-year students were encouraged to engage with community partners and several partners found this critical to their continuity of mission. The second year, students form groups to work on their PICS or CCI projects, giving students a chance to follow their passion by instilling change. Leadership Studies students demonstrated great creativity, adaptability, and resilience to foster social change.

Our Community Partner Sites for 2025-2026:

- A Little Help
- Bikes Together
- Children's Hospital Colorado
- Colectivo de Paz
- Denver Animal Shelter
- Cafe 180



Events

Leadership Studies hosts a variety of co-curricular, experiential, and community-building events for students throughout the year. They range in size from impactful and intimate gatherings, to larger community-focused learning events with over 120 people. During the 2026-2027 academic year, CWC hosted 10 events, PLP hosted 28 events, and both programs hosted 5 combined events.

	CWC	PLP
Events with alumni engagement	20%	39%
Events with career focus	40%	23%
Events with public good focus	30%	18%

Speakers

During the Fall Quarter 2026, CWC hosted Dr. Stevie Lee as our fall speaker. Dr. Lee's talk on Humanizing Change Through Relationality included reflective dialogue on the cycles of life and transformation, framed through the indigenous lens of relationality–a way of understanding ourselves in connection with land, community, spirit, and story. Students engaged in meaningful conversation and Q&A discussion. Dr. Lee is the Associate Director for Community Connections, Division of Community Support & Engagement at the University of Denver. She works to support the current DU community, focusing on social and cultural support, as well as overall well-being.

In Winter Quarter 2026, CWC and PLP Leadership Studies students engaged with John Miller IV as our winter speaker. John was the former associate director of Black Community Initiatives at DU. He presented an interactive workshop on self-authorship and during the event PLP and CWC students engaged with small groups and through personalized reflection. PLP also hosted an interactive speaker event with Chaos Bloom Improv Theatre focused on important improv elements and how they related to leadership development theory and execution.

Our spring speakers were Robert Cohen, the majority owner of Denver Summit FC, and Emily Walsh, their fan engagement coordinator. Students listened spellbound to their stories of bringing a professional women's soccer team to Denver and the leadership involved in crafting and sustaining community. As a result, 35 students and alumni mobilized to attend a Summit game.

Alumni Engagement

Leadership Studies alumni remain valued and critical members of our community, frequently donating their time, talent, and treasure back to our programs and students. Alumni also registered for DU's mentoring platform, Crimson Constellation, where they were searchable by current DU students to connect about professional paths and life advice.

CWC

The CWC Alumni Advisory Board is currently being revamped and seeking new members to best support our alumni and current CWC Leaderships Scholars. CWC alumni were involved this year by supporting our recruitment efforts. We had three CWC alumnae read and provide feedback for prospective CWC applications, as well as two CWC alumnae on our decision-making committee, which involved attending meetings and sharing input on the accepted cohort.

PLP

Our PLP Alumni Board continues to function with nine local and nationally dispersed members who meet monthly. This Alumni Board was created in 2010-2011 and continues to provide professional development and networking for alumni, involvement with current PLP students, and financial support for current PLP student programs, particularly the Leadership Development Fund.

Most importantly, this year saw us celebrate 30 years of PLP, culminating in five events over two days in fall quarter. PLP's legacy and impact were showcased and events included DU tours, professional developments, student engagement opportunities, and broomball at Magness Arena. Most importantly, we launched our $50k fundraising initiative, the Carl Larson Memorial Fund, in honor of one of PLP's founders, Dr. Carl Larson. Donors from around the country, current students, parents, and staff and faculty generously contributed to honor Carl's legacy.



Campus Leadership and Accolades

Our students routinely apply their classroom learning to the campus community and beyond, both in the leadership roles they hold and the awards and funding they receive. Here are some highlights from the 2025-2026 year:

- (1) Udall Scholarship recipient (DU's first-ever recipient)
- (2) Fulbright Fellowship recipients and (1) alternate
- (2) Boettcher Student Leader of the Year finalists
- (4) Gilman Scholarship recipients

Additionally:

- Leadership Studies students comprise 50% of Undergraduate Student Government committee chairs and at least 23% of Undergraduate Student Government senators.

- This year's undergraduate student body president was a Leadership Studies student, as is the 2026-2027 president.

- Leadership Studies students were presidents of the Alpine Club, Panhellenic Council, Psi Chi (International Honors Society in Psychology), Chi Omega, Delta Delta Delta, women's and men's club soccer, club curling, DU Grilling Society, and Asian Student Alliance, among others. Overall, dozens of executive leadership roles in Greek life and campus organizations and associations were held by Leadership Studies students.



Persistence: CWC

For Fall 2026, CWC has:

- 19 first-years
- 19 second-years
- 12 third-years (1 additional student in this cohort graduated early)
- 10 fourth-years (3 additional students in this cohort graduated early)

In the 2025-2026 academic year, we approved 22 CWC minors in Leadership Studies to those graduating. Below are the persistence rates within the University of first year CWC Leadership Studies students who continued at the University into their second year from 2018-2025. Exit interviews are conducted with any student we know decides to drop the program or transfer out of DU. The top three reasons students disclose leaving DU in order of frequency are: 1) finances; 2) transferring to another school; 3) academic major of interest not offered at DU; 4) want to be closer to home or other family issues. Reasons for not continuing in the minor are: 1) cannot accommodate the minor requirements due to other major or minor required coursework

Cohort Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Initial cohort size	11	12	15	17	20	19	18	21
Students continuing into 2nd year	9	10	13	15	19	17	16	19
Persistence rate	82%	83%	87%	88%	95%	89%	89%	90%

Persistence: PLP

For Fall 2026, PLP has:

- 91 first-years
- 57 second-years
- 56 third-years (1 additional student in this cohort graduated early)
- 62 fourth-years (3 additional students in this cohort graduated early)

In the 2025-2026 academic year, we approved 59 PLP minors in Leadership Studies to those graduating. Below are the persistence rates within the University of first year PLP Leadership Studies students who continued at the University into their second year from 2018-2025. Exit interviews are conducted with any student we know decides to drop the program or transfer out of DU. The top three reasons students disclose leaving DU in order of frequency are: 1) finances; 2) transferring to another school; 3) academic major of interest not offered at DU; 4) want to be closer to home or other family issues. Reasons for not continuing in the minor are: 1) cannot accommodate the minor requirements due to other major or minor required coursework 2) not what they expected the program to be; 3) not a good social fit.

Cohort Year	2018	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
Initial cohort size	88	88	88	88	92	91	92	93
Students continuing into 2nd year cohort	54	70	69	66	65	71	66	55
Persistence within cohort rate	61%	80%	78%	75%	71%	78%	72%	59%*
Persistence within Leadership Minor	-	-	-	-	-	-	-	73%

***** While 55 students continued on the PLP track for their second year, an additional 12 opted to continue in the all-university leadership and social impact minor for overall persistence of 73%.

Student Feedback

The Leadership Studies program conducts a year-end assessment through an anonymous online survey each spring.

Highlights of What We Learned- the Positive:

- Students identified 3 top elements contributing to their personal development and leadership growth: PLP faculty/staff, community of peers, and the Partners in Community and Community Change Initiative projects.
- 85% of first year students rated their Leadership Studies experience as good, very good, or excellent
- 84% of second year students rated their Leadership Studies experience as good, very good, or excellent
- 90% of first year students said they dedicated a moderate, high, or very high amount of effort to their learning experience this year.
- 92% of second year students said they dedicated a moderate, high, or very high amount of effort to their learning experience this year.
- First-year students identified three top co-curricular opportunities they saw as most meaningful: living on the floor with other peers (PLP), First Ascent at KMC with their cohort, and community events.
- Second-year students identified two top co-curricular opportunities they saw as most meaningful: Partners in Community and Community Change Initiative projects, and speaker events

Highlights of What We Learned- Improvements:

- A charge to better integrate CWC and PLP students and classes, while simultaneously acknowledging the programs' distinct roots and attributes.
- More inter-cohort connection and mentoring opportunities, especially in the first year
- More student say on speaker events and themes, as well as how many are required
- Better accommodating commuter students and their unique needs

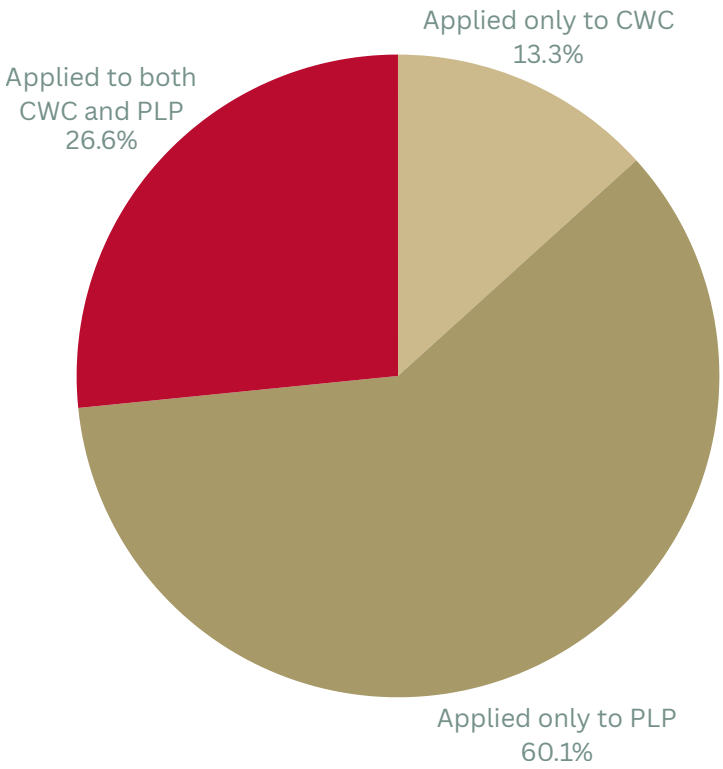
Recruitment

In building a diverse student profile to provide the best learning community, the following comparisons are notable for our incoming Fall 2026 cohort. This recruitment cycle was also the first tie CWC and PLP created and worked from a combined single application to make the process easier for potential students.

Total unique applications to Leadership Studies: 173

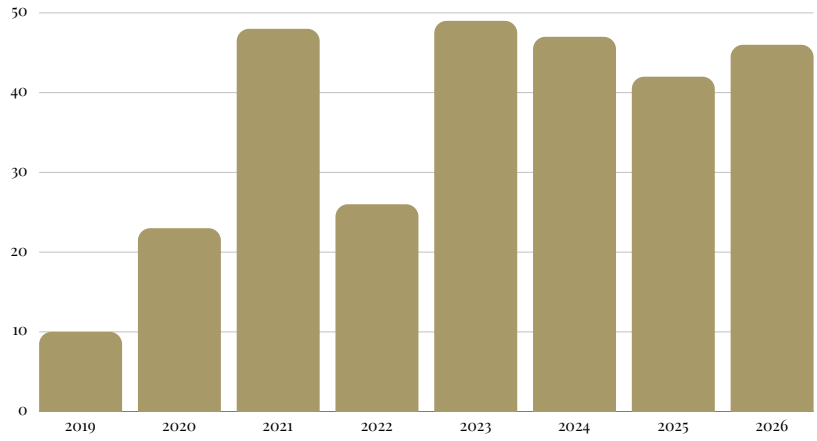
- CWC applications: 69
  - CWC only: 23
  - Applied to both CWC and PLP: 46

- PLP total applications: 150
  - PLP only: 104
  - Applied to both CWC and PLP: 46

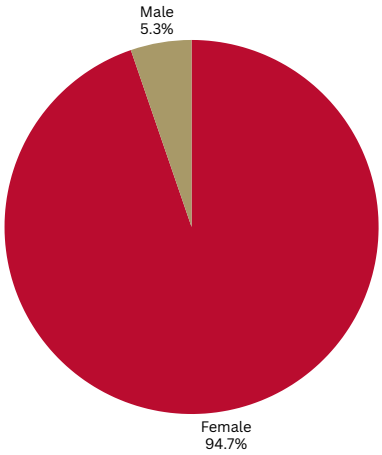


Recruitment, cont'd

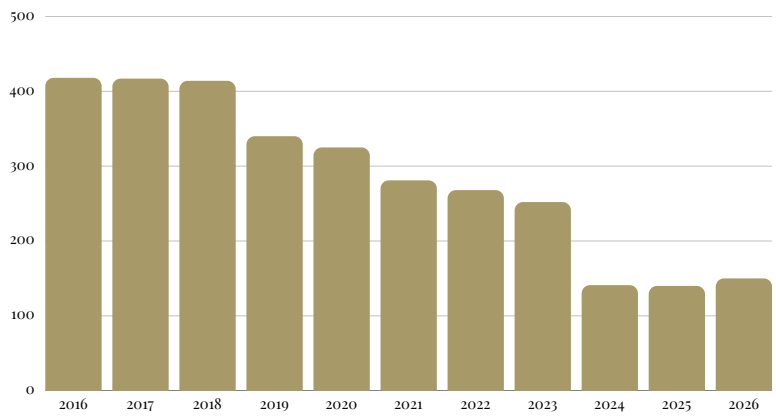
CWC Application Numbers



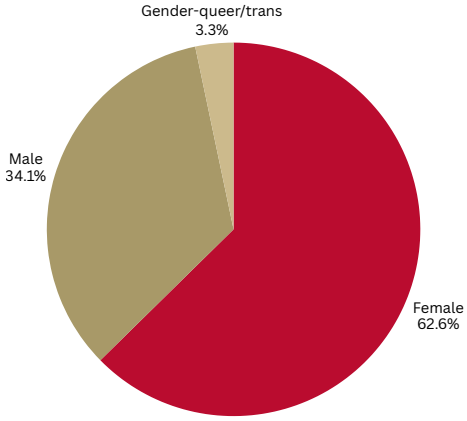
Fall 2026 CWC Class



PLP Application Numbers



Fall 2026 PLP Class



Recruitment, cont'd

Impact of PLP Acceptance on DU Attendance







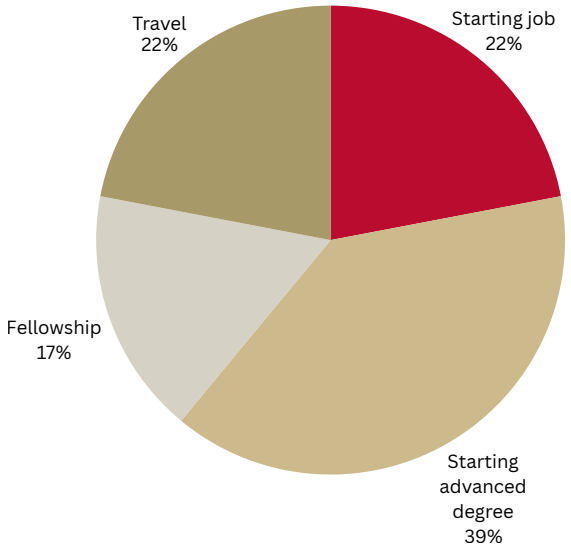
We surveyed students accepted into PLP about the correlation between their acceptance into the program and their ultimate decision to attend the University of Denver. Looking at the results:

- 75% indicated that PLP acceptance impacted their decision to attend DU
- 31% indicated that PLP had a fairly large impact on their decision to attend DU

Class of 2026 Plans

CWC Class of 2026

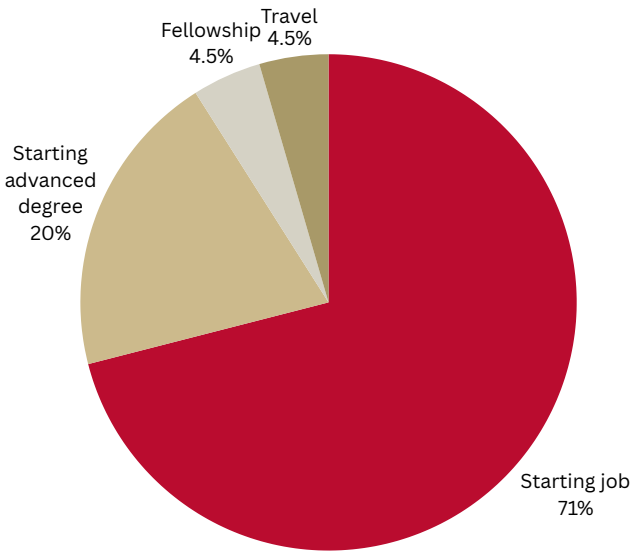
Of the CWC graduating class of 2026 survey respondents, students were pursuing these next steps:





PLP Class of 2026

Of the PLP graduating class of 2026 survey respondents, students were pursuing these next steps:





Finances and Scholarships

The Leadership Studies program budget provides for:

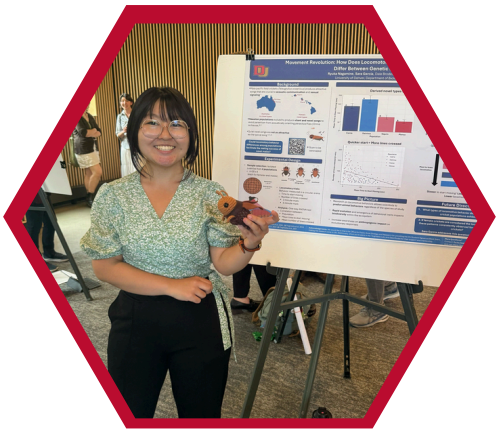
- Leadership training events
- Speakers
- Student learning assistants
- Emergency funds
- Conference attendance
- Co-curricular enrichment for our students
- Multi-faceted recruitment process

We were also able to award program participants funding from various scholarships and grants:

- PLP First Bank Scholarships: 4 students
- PLP Leadership Development Fund: 3 students
- PLP Tolstoi Scholarships: 4 students
- CWC Scholarships: 54 students
- CWC Enrichment Fund: 4 students
- CWC Emergency Fund: 6 students







Alignment with DU Strategies

Leadership Studies continues to be a university asset on many different levels. Not only does the program draw top-level students to the University of Denver, but it also provides a robust leadership development and leadership academic study experience for close to 400 undergraduates. Faculty and staff continue to produce stronger programming, emerging leadership concepts in the classroom, and alumni development. The students, faculty, staff, and alumni are very grateful for the University's commitment philosophically, academically, and fiscally.

Leadership Studies continues to support the major transformative directions and strategic initiatives of DU Forward and the 4D Student Experience, with areas of synchronicity including:

Drive Academic, Research, and Institutional Excellence

- Students engaged in literature reviews, research studies, and stakeholder interviews for robust research relative to their second year signature work projects.
- Faculty presented and participated in multiple nationwide and international conferences, providing the networking and ideas necessary to deliver excellence. co-curricularly and in the classroom and continue to rethink inclusive pedagogy
- LDRS 3000 capstone promoted student reflection and action on character, values and ethical decision making for their personal lives at DU and in future careers.

Embrace Bold Innovation

- Curriculum redesign to add flexible pathways to reach new student populations
- Addition of new travel courses
- Launched the 4D Character and Leadership Micro-credential

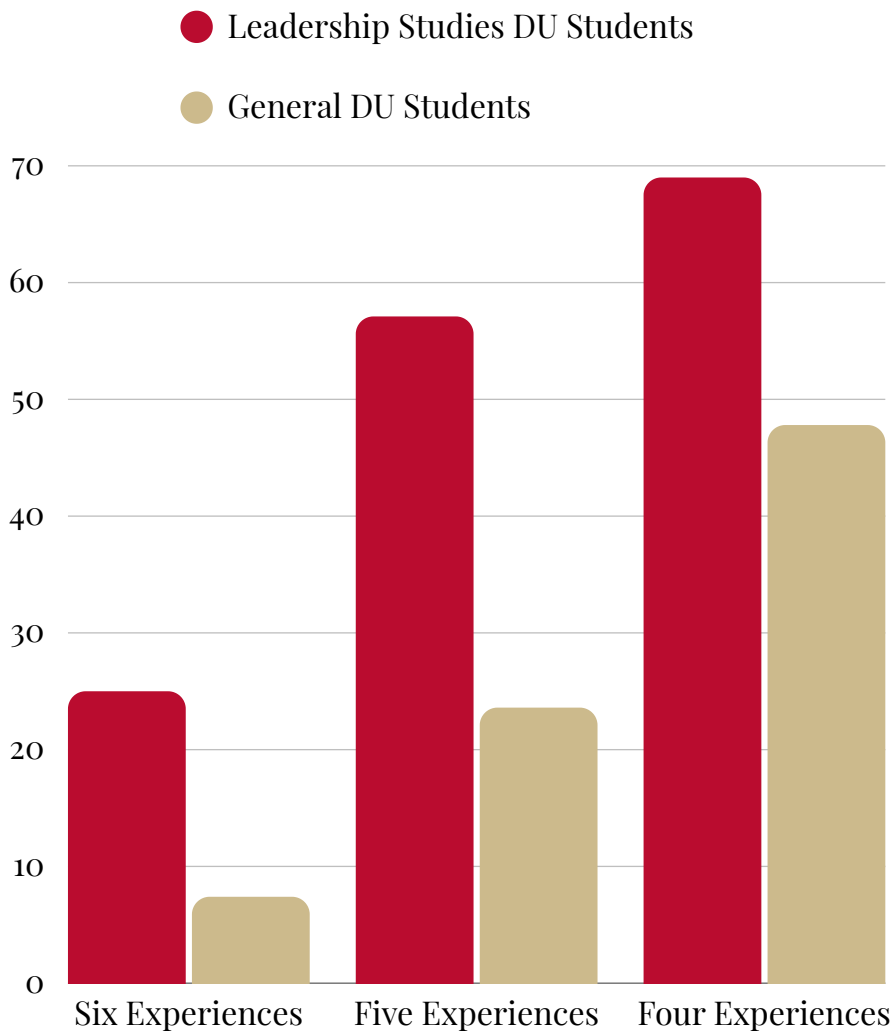
Elevate DU's Distinctiveness

- Transformative teaching and learning through high-impact practices such as cohorts, capstones, and mentored research experiences.
- We worked extensively to build our alumni community through events, communication, and new resources, and are seen as a model for engagement within DU.
- Self-reflection tools such as the Insights Discovery are used to give students a strong sense of self and how to increase emotional intelligence and productive teaming relationships.

Gallup Student Experience Survey

Our programs in Leadership Studies continue to be linked with significant outcomes related to the 4-Dimensional Experience. Results of the Gallup Student Experience Survey indicate significant positive differences for students in the CWC and PLP cohorts. This survey conducted by DU's Office of Institutional Research and Analysis asked students to rate their experiences as a college student. Gallup has identified six key student experiences that are correlated with positive post-graduation outcomes such as having professors and mentors that care about them or working on a project that takes more than a semester to complete. Of those "Big Six" experiences:

- 25% of LDRS Students had all six experiences compared to 7.4% of DU Students and 3% of college students nationwide.
- 57.1% of LDRS Students had at least five experiences compared to 23.6% of DU Students
- 69% of LDRS Students had at least four experiences compared to 47.8% of DU Students



Gallup Student Experience Survey, cont'd

Additional results from this institutional survey indicate that Leadership Studies students scored higher on:

- items related to character development: wiser, more just, character strengths, equipped to positively change the world
- their evaluation of relationships with professors and staff: professors care about me as a person, have a mentor who encourages me, treated with respect, worked with a faculty member
- sense of belonging at DU and appreciation of their DU experience, and are more likely to recommend DU to family, friends, and colleagues.
- confidence in their ability to succeed after DU and their ability to have a meaningful life.







Team Highlights



EFFLEY BROOKS III, MBA

TEACHING ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR

- Hosted graduation at the Cable Center for the 5th cohort of Leadership Africa (nine-month leadership development program for a diverse group of professionals).
- Created the S.K.A.T.E.R. model (inspired by the Impact Equation) of the leader capacity areas that are impacted/developed through leadership studies programing and training.
- Gave the opening keynote address for the Together with Veterans Annual Summit.



YONA ESTRADA, M.S.

PROGRAM COORDINATOR

- Completed first full-year in a new role as Leadership Studies Program Coordinator
- Oversaw CWC Leadership Scholars' largest application pool in history during recruitment
- Hosted 2nd annual CWC Colloquium and other signature events with a joint effort for further collaboration between all Leadership Studies Students



PAUL KOSEMPEL, PH.D.

DIRECTOR/TEACHING PROFESSOR

- Co-wrote two journal articles; published in New Directions on Student Leadership and Qualitative Research Journal.
- Facilitated multiple presentations at the International Leadership Association Conference in Prague, Czech Republic.
- Delivered the keynote address to Zeta Psi Fraternity Annual Convention in Detroit, Michigan.

Team Highlights



LEAH MCFAIL, M.S.

ASSISTANT DIRECTOR

- Executed five events over two days for PLP's 30th anniversary, engaging hundreds of alumni and students and mobilizing significant fundraising efforts.
- Mentored a PLP student on her application and wrote her a letter of recommendation, helping her become DU's first-ever Udall Scholarship recipient.
- Formalized our public good partnership with local non-profit Youth Celebrate Diversity via CWC and PLP student leadership at their annual training summit and annual regional conference.



INDHIRA UDOFIA, PH.D.

FACULTY DIRECTOR, CWC LEADERSHIP SCHOLARS/TEACHING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

- Published two journal articles; published in Culture and the Journal of Feminist Studies in Religion
- Won the Diversity Award from the DU Writing Center
- Relaunched the Care Closet, which supports graduate and undergraduate students who need basic and gender affirming resources and items



JOE WALSH, PH.D.

TEACHING ASSISTANT PROFESSOR

- Facilitated presentation on the significance of the distinction between leadership scholarship and leader development at the International Studying Leadership Conference in St. Andrews, Scotland.
- Researched the relationship between the 4D holistic learning framework and classroom learning as a 4D Teaching Faculty Fellow.
- Interviewed several virtual leaders for a summer course that investigates virtual workplace culture and digital communities.

Thank You

It was a year of growth and change for the Leadership Studies Department, and we look forward to carrying our momentum forward into the fall and beyond. A special thanks to our campus partners and alumni for their continued engagement with our students and programs; your partnership helps us guide students committing to practicing inclusive leadership for a just world. And congratulations to our 79 graduates and 110 incoming first-year students!







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